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Customer No. 20350  
TOWNSEND and TOWNSEND and CREW LLP  
Two Embarcadero Center, 8<sup>th</sup> Floor  
San Francisco, California 94111-3834  
(303) 571-4000

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I hereby certify that this is being deposited with the United States Postal Service "Express Mail Post Office to Addressee" service under 37 CFR 1.10 on the date indicated above, addressed to:

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By:

*Bonnie Reekles*

Sir:

Transmitted herewith for filing under 37 CFR 1.53(b) is the

- ☒ patent application of  
☐ continuation patent application of  
☐ divisional patent application of  
☐ continuation-in-part patent application of

Inventor(s)/Applicant Identifier: Brian R. Woods et al.

For: PROCESSING OF UNSOLICITED BULK ELECTRONIC MAIL

☐ This application claims priority from each of the following Application Nos./filing dates:

the disclosure(s) of which is (are) incorporated by reference.

☐ Please amend this application by adding the following before the first sentence: "This application is a ☐ continuation ☐ continuation-in-part of and claims the benefit of U.S. Provisional Application No. 60/\_\_\_\_\_, filed \_\_\_\_\_, the disclosure of which is incorporated by reference."

Enclosed are:

- ☒ 12 page(s) of specification  
☒ 4 page(s) of claims  
☒ 1 page of Abstract  
☒ 7 sheet(s) of ☒ formal ☐ informal drawing(s).

An assignment of the invention to Yahoo! Inc.

A ☒ signed ☐ unsigned Declaration & Power of Attorney

A ☐ signed ☐ unsigned Declaration.

A Power of Attorney by Assignee with Certificate Under 37 CFR Section 3.73(b).

A verified statement to establish small entity status under 37 CFR 1.9 and 37 CFR 1.27 ☐ is enclosed ☐ was filed in the prior

A petition to extend time to respond in the parent application.

Notification of change of ☐ power of attorney ☐ correspondence address filed in prior application.

	(Col. 1)	(Col. 2)	
FOR:	NO. FILED	NO. EXTRA	
BASIC FEE			
TOTAL CLAIMS	21 - 20	= *1	
INDEP. CLAIMS	3 - 3	= *0	
<input type="checkbox"/> MULTIPLE DEPENDENT CLAIM PRESENTED			

\* If the difference in Col. 1 is less than 0, enter "0" in Col. 2.

#### SMALL ENTITY

RATE	FEE
	\$345.00
x \$9.00 =	
x \$39.00 =	
+ \$130.00 =	
TOTAL	

OR

#### OTHER THAN SMALL ENTITY

RATE	FEE
	\$690.00
x \$18.00 =	\$18.00
x \$78.00 =	\$0.00
+ \$260.00 =	
TOTAL	\$708.00

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Respectfully submitted,  
TOWNSEND and TOWNSEND and CREW LLP

Telephone:  
(303) 571-4000

Facsimile:  
(303) 571-4321

Thomas D. Franklin  
Reg No. 43,616  
Attorneys for Applicant

**PATENT APPLICATION**  
**PROCESSING OF UNSOLICITED BULK ELECTRONIC MAIL**

Inventors:

Brian R. Woods, a citizen of United States, residing at,  
260 Wallet Street  
San Francisco, CA 94102

Udi Manber, a citizen of United States, residing at,  
883 Robb Road  
Palo Alto, CA 94306

Assignee:

Yahoo! Inc.  
3420 Central Expressway  
Santa Clara, CA 95051

Entity: Other than a small entity

## **PROCESSING OF UNSOLICITED BULK ELECTRONIC MAIL**

### **BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION**

This invention relates in general to electronic mail (e-mail) systems and, more specifically, to processing unsolicited e-mail distributed in bulk.

5           Unsolicited e-mail distributed in bulk, sometime referred to as Spam™, is the scourge of the Internet community. It is not uncommon for a user to receive ten to fifty unsolicited e-mail messages per day. Studies have shown that ten percent of all e-mail traffic on the Internet is unsolicited bulk e-mail. A sender of unsolicited e-mail can purchase a list of millions of e-mail addresses from a list broker and easily distribute a  
10       message to the list for little or no cost. The cost of the unsolicited e-mail is paid by the providers of the Internet backbone and the users who pay access charges to download their e-mail. The senders of unsolicited e-mail offer services such as how to get rich quick, how to loose weight fast, hot stock tips, various pornographic web sites, and other shady “opportunities.”

15           Preventing unsolicited e-mail from annoying users is a burgeoning industry. Internet service providers (ISPs) and e-mail application service providers (ASPs) experience subscriber attrition that is attributable to excessive amounts of unsolicited e-mail. For example, a user may switch to other ISP or e-mail ASP to experience a temporary reprieve from unsolicited e-mail. Unfortunately, the reprieve  
20       only last until the list brokers harvest the new e-mail address of the user.

          Technology used to combat the efforts of unsolicited e-mailers is an ever-escalating arms race. The ISPs and e-mail ASPs will develop a new technology for detecting unsolicited e-mail broadcasts and the unsolicited e-mailers will develop techniques that renders the new technology ineffective. For example, once an unsolicited  
25       e-mail message is identified, the ISPs and e-mail ASPs search for other messages with the exact subject and block those messages. To combat this, the unsolicited e-mailers often attach a changing tag to each subject such that no two subject lines are the same in a large unsolicited e-mail broadcast. As those skilled in the art appreciate, more sophisticated techniques for detecting and blocking of unsolicited e-mail are desired.

## SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

The present invention involves detecting unsolicited electronic mail distributed in bulk. In one embodiment, a method for automatically processing electronic mail loads an electronic mail message. Non non-textual information is removed from the electronic mail message. A first portion from the electronic mail message is located and a first code smaller than the first portion and indicative of the first portion is generated. A second portion from the electronic mail message is located and a second code smaller than the second portion and indicative of the second portion is generated. The first code and the second code are stored.

## BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

Fig. 1 is a block diagram of one embodiment of an e-mail distribution system;

Fig. 2 is a block diagram of an embodiment of an e-mail distribution system;

Fig. 3 is an embodiment of an unsolicited e-mail message exhibiting techniques used by unsolicited mailers;

Fig. 4A is a first portion of a flow diagram of an embodiment of an e-mail processing method;

Fig. 4B is an embodiment of a second portion of the embodiment of Fig. 4A;

Fig. 4C is another embodiment of a second portion of the embodiment of Fig. 4A; and

Fig. 5 is a flow diagram of an embodiment for detecting similar e-mail messages.

## DESCRIPTION OF THE SPECIFIC EMBODIMENTS

The present invention processes electronic mail (e-mail) to detect unsolicited e-mail distributed in bulk. Similar messages are detected in a robust manner such that the attempts by unsolicited e-mailers to vary the text of messages in a broadcast are rendered ineffective.

Referring first to Fig. 1, a block diagram of one embodiment of an e-mail distribution system 100 is shown. Included in the distribution system 100 are an unsolicited mailer 104, the Internet 108, a mail system, and a user 116. The Internet 108

is used to connect the unsolicited mailer 104, the mail system 112 and the user, although, direct connections or other wired or wireless networks could be used in other embodiments.

The unsolicited mailer 104 is a party that sends e-mail indiscriminately to thousands and possibly millions of unsuspecting users 116 in a short period time. Usually, there is no preexisting relationship between the user 116 and the unsolicited mailer 104. The unsolicited mailer 104 sends an e-mail message with the help of a list broker. The list broker provides the e-mail addresses of the users 116, grooms the list to keep e-mail addresses current by monitoring which addresses bounce and adds new addresses through various harvesting techniques.

The unsolicited mailer provides the e-mail message to the list broker for processing and distribution. Software tools of the list broker insert random strings in the subject, forge e-mail addresses of the sender, forge routing information, select open relays to send the e-mail message through, and use other techniques to avoid detection by conventional detection algorithms. The body of the unsolicited e-mail often contains patterns similar to all e-mail messages broadcast for the unsolicited mailer 104. For example, there is contact information such as a phone number, an e-mail address, a web address, or postal address in the message so the user 116 can contact the unsolicited mailer 104 in case the solicitation triggers interest from the user 116.

The mail system 112 receives, filters and sorts e-mail from legitimate and illegitimate sources. Separate folders within the mail system 112 store incoming e-mail messages for the user 116. The messages that the mail system 112 suspects are unsolicited mail are stored in a folder called "Bulk Mail" and all other messages are stored in a folder called "Inbox." In this embodiment, the mail system is operated by an e-mail application service provider (ASP). The e-mail application along with the e-mail messages are stored in the mail system 112. The user 116 accesses the application remotely via a web browser without installing any e-mail software on the computer of the user 116. In alternative embodiments, the e-mail application could reside on the computer of the user and only the e-mail messages would be stored on the mail system.

The user 116 machine is a subscriber to an e-mail service provided by the mail system 112. An internet service provider (ISP) connects the user machine 116 to the Internet. The user activates a web browser and enters a universal resource locator (URL) which corresponds to an internet protocol (IP) address of the mail system 112. A domain

name server (DNS) translates the URL to the IP address, as is well known to those of ordinary skill in the art.

With reference to Fig. 2, a block diagram of an embodiment of an e-mail distribution system 200 is shown. This embodiment includes the unsolicited mailer 104,  
5 the Internet 108, the mail system 112, and a remote open relay list 240. Although not shown, there are other solicited mailers that could be businesses or other users. The user 116 generally welcomes e-mail from solicited mailers.

E-mail messages are routed by the Internet through an unpredictable route that “hops” from relay to relay. The route taken by an e-mail message is documented in  
10 the e-mail message header. For each relay, the IP address of that relay is provided along with the IP address of the previous relay. In this way, the alleged route is known by inspection of the message header.

The remote open relay list 240 is located across the Internet 108 and remote to the mail system 112. This list 240 includes all know relays on the Internet 108  
15 that are misconfigured or otherwise working improperly. Unlike a normal relay, an open relay does not correctly report where the message came from. This allows list brokers and unsolicited mailers 104 to obscure the path back to the server that originated the message. This subterfuge avoids some filters of unsolicited e-mail that detect origination servers that correspond to known unsolicited mailers 104 or their list brokers.

As first described above in relation to Fig. 1, the mail system 112 sorts e-mail messages and detects unsolicited e-mail messages. The mail system 112 also hosts the mail application that allows the user to view her e-mail. Included in the mail system 112 are one or more mail transfer agents, an exemplar database 208, user mail storage 212, an approved list 216, a block list 244, a key word database 230, a local open relay  
20 list 220, a short-term small message exemplars (STSME) store 224, a short-term large message exemplars (STLME) store 228, a long-term small message exemplars (LTSME) store 232, and a long-term large message exemplars (LTLME) store 236.

The mail transfer agents 204 receive the email and detect unsolicited e-mail. To handle large amounts of messages, the incoming e-mail is divided among one or  
30 more mail transfer agents 204. Once the mail transfer agent 204 gets notified of the incoming e-mail message, the mail transfer agent 204 will either discard the message, store the message in the account of the user, or store the message in a bulk mail folder of the user. The remote open relay list 240, an exemplar database 208, an approved list 216,

a block list 244, a key word database 230, and a local open relay list 220 are used in determining if a received e-mail message was sent from an unsolicited mailer 104.

The user mail storage 212 is a repository for e-mail messages sent to the account for the user. For example, all e-mail messages addressed to

5 sam1f34z@yahoo.com would be stored in the user mail storage 212 corresponding to that e-mail address. The e-mail messages are organized into two or more folders. Unsolicited e-mail is filtered and sent to the bulk mail folder and other e-mail is sent by default to the inbox folder. The user 116 can configure a sorting algorithm to sort incoming e-mail into folders other than the inbox.

10 The approved list 216 contains names of known entities that regularly send large amounts of solicited e-mail to users. These companies are known to send e-mail only when the contact is previously assented to. Examples of who may be on this list are Amazon.com, Excite.com, Yahoo.com, Microsoft.com, etc. Messages sent by members of the approved list 216 are stored in the user mail storage 212 without checking to see if  
15 the messages are unsolicited. Among other ways new members are added to the approved list 216 when users complain that solicited e-mail is being filtered and stored in their bulk mail folder by mistake. A customer service representative reviews the complaints and adds the IP address of the domains to the approved list 216. Other embodiments could use an automated mechanism for adding domains to the approved list  
20 216 such as when a threshold amount of users complain about improper filtering, the domain is automatically added to the list 216 without needing a customer service representative.

The block list 244 includes IP addresses of list brokers and unsolicited mailers 104 that are known to send mostly unsolicited e-mail. The current threshold for  
25 getting on the block list 244 is sending ten thousand messages in a week. A member of the approved list 216 is not also on the block list 244. When the mail transfer agent 204 connects to the relay presenting the e-mail message, a protocol-level handshaking occurs. From this handshaking process, the actual IP address of that relay is known. E-mail message connections from a member of the block list 244 are closed down without  
30 receiving the e-mail message. Once the IP address of the sender of the message is found on the block list 244, all processing stops and the connection to the IP address of the list broker or unsolicited mailer 104 is broken. The IP address checked against the block list 244 is the actual IP address resulting from the protocol-level handshaking process and is not the derived from the header of the e-mail message.

The key word database 230 stores certain terms that uniquely identify an e-mail message that contains any of those terms as an unsolicited message. Examples of these key words are telephone numbers, URLs or e-mail addresses that are used by unsolicited mailers 104 or list brokers. While processing e-mail messages, the mail transfer agent 204 screens for these key words. If a key word is found, the e-mail message is discarded without further processing.

The exemplar database 208 catalogues the various finger print stores 224, 228, 232, 236 used in the detection algorithm along with a local open relay list 220. The exemplar database 208 acts as a server providing the information in various stores 224, 228, 232, 236 to the mail transfer agent 204 during processing of an e-mail message.

The local open relay list 220 is similar to the remote open relay list 240, but is maintained by the mail system 112. Commonly used open relays are stored in this list 220 to reduce the need for query to the Internet for open relay information, which can have significant latency. Additionally, the local open relay list 220 is maintained by the mail system 112 and is free from third party information that may corrupt the remote open relay list 240.

There are four exemplar stores 224, 228, 232, 236 coupled to the exemplar database 208. Exemplars for the e-mail messages allow counting the number of times a similar message is received by the mail system. Each e-mail message is suspected by the system 112 to be unsolicited. Exemplars for the message are stored in one of the stores 224, 228, 232, 236 to serve as a fingerprint for that message. The short-term message exemplars stores 224, 228 store the most recent two hours of messages. If messages that are similar to each other are received by the short-term message exemplars stores 224, 228 in sufficient quantity, the message is moved to the long-term message exemplars stores 232, 236. The long-term message stores 232, 236 retain a message entry until no similar messages are received in a thirty-six hour period. There are two stores for each of the short-term stores 224, 228 and the long-term stores 232, 236 because there are different algorithms that produce different exemplars for long messages and short messages.

Referring next to Fig. 3, an embodiment of an unsolicited e-mail message 300 is shown that exhibits some techniques used by unsolicited mailers 104. The message 300 is subdivided into a header 304 and a body 308. The message header includes routing information 312, a subject 316, the sending party and other information. The routing information 312 is often inaccurate along with the reference sending party to



avoid blocking further unsolicited messages from that source. Included in the body 308 of the message is the information the unsolicited mailer 104 wishes the user 116 to read. Typically, there is a URL 320 or other mechanism for contacting the unsolicited mailer in the body of the message in case the message presents something the user is interested in.

5 To thwart an exact comparison of message bodies 308 to detect unsolicited e-mail, a evolving code 324 is often included in the body 308.

With reference to Figs. 4A and 4B, a flow diagram of an embodiment of an e-mail processing method is depicted. Fig. 4C is not part of this embodiment. The process starts in step 404 where the mail transfer agent 204 begins to receive the e-mail message 300 from the Internet 108. This begins with a protocol level handshake where the relay sending the message 300 provides its IP address. In step 408, a test is performed to determine if the source of the e-mail message 300 is on the block list 244. If the source of the message is on the block list 244 as determined in step 412, the communication is dropped in step 416 and the e-mail message 300 is never received. Alternatively,  
10 processing continues to step 420 if the message source is not on the block list 244.

E-mail messages 300 from certain sources are accepted without further investigation. Each message is checked to determine if it was sent from an IP addresses on the approved list 216 in steps 420 and 424. The IP addresses on the approved list 216 correspond to legitimate senders of e-mail messages in bulk. Legitimate senders of e-mail messages are generally those that have previous relationships with a user 116 where the user assents to receiving the e-mail broadcast. If the IP address is on the approved list 216, the message is stored in the mail account of the user 116.  
15

Further processing occurs to determine if the message 300 was unsolicited if the source of the message 300 is not on the approved list 216. In step 432, the message body 308 is screened for key words 230. The key words 230 are strings of characters that uniquely identify a message 300 as belonging to an unsolicited mailer 104 and may include a URL 320, a phone number or an e-mail address. If any key words are present in the message body 308, the message 300 is discarded in step 416 without further processing.  
20

To determine if the e-mail message 300 has been sent a number of times, an algorithm is used to determine if the e-mail message 300 is similar to others received in the past. The algorithm does not require exact matches and only requires some of the exemplars that form a fingerprint to match. In step 440, exemplars are extracted from the message body 308 to form a fingerprint for the message 308. A determination is made in  
25  
30

step 444 as to whether there are two or more exemplars harvested from the message body 308.

In this embodiment, more than two exemplars are considered sufficient to allow matching, but two or less is considered insufficient. When more exemplars are  
5 needed, a small message algorithm is used to extract a new set of exemplars to form the fingerprint in step 448. The small message algorithm increases the chances of accepting a string of characters for generating an exemplar upon. Future matching operations depend upon whether the exemplars were extracted using the small message or large message algorithm to generate those exemplars. The small message stores 224, 232 are used with  
10 the small message algorithm, and the large message stores 228, 232 are used with the large message algorithm.

The thresholds for detection of unsolicited e-mail are reduced when the message is received by the mail system 112 from an open relay. Open relays are often used by unsolicited mailers 104 to mask the IP address of the true origin of the e-mail  
15 message 300. By masking the true origin, searching for messages from that IP address is not used to detect unsolicited mailers. However, the IP address of the relay that last sent the message to the mail system 112 can be accurately determined. The actual IP address of the last relay before the message 300 reaches the mail system 112 is known from the protocol level handshake with that relay. The actual IP address is first checked against  
20 the local open relay list 220 for a match. If there is no match, the actual IP address is next checked against the remote open relay list 240 across the Internet 108. If either the local or remote open relay lists 220, 240 include the actual IP address, first detection threshold is reduced from fifty to twenty-five, and the second detection threshold is reduced from one hundred to fifty in step 460 as described below.

Depending on whether the e-mail message 300 is a short or long message as determined in step 444, either the STSME store 224 or STLME store 228 is checked for a matching entry. The STSME and STLME stores 228, 224 hold the last two hours of message fingerprints along with a first count for each. The first count corresponds to the total number of times the mail transfer agents 204 have seen a similar message within a  
30 two hour period so long as the count does not exceed the first threshold.

A test for matches is performed in step 464. A match only requires a percentage of the exemplars in the fingerprint to match. In this embodiment, a match is found when all of the exemplars of a fingerprint stored in the respective STSME or STLME store 228, 224 are found in the exemplars of the message currently being

processed. Other embodiments could only require a percentage of the exemplars in the respective STSME or STLME store 228, 224 be found in the message being processed.

If a match is found in step 464 between the current e-mail message 300 and the respective STSME or STLME store 228, 224, processing continues to step 468 where a first count is incremented. The first count is compared to the first threshold in step 472. Depending on the determination in step 456, the first threshold is either fifty or twenty-five. If the first threshold is not exceeded, processing continues to step 484 where the e-mail message 300 is stored in the user's inbox folder.

Alternatively, processing continues to step 476 if the first threshold is exceeded by the first count. The fingerprint of exemplars for the e-mail message 300 is moved from the short-term store 224, 228 to the respective long-term store 232, 236 in step 476. In step 480, the new fingerprint will replace the oldest fingerprint in the long-term store 232, 236 that has not been incremented in the last thirty-six hours. A fingerprint becomes stale after thirty-six hours without any change in count. If there is no stale entry, the new fingerprint is added to the store 232, 236 and an index that points to the fingerprint is added to the beginning of a list of indexes such that the freshest or least stale fingerprint indexes are at the beginning of the index list of the long-term store 232, 236. Once the fingerprint is added to appropriate the long-term store 232, 236, the e-mail message 300 is stored in the account of the user in step 484.

Returning back to step 464, processing continues to step 486 if there is not a match to the appropriate short-term message database 224, 228. In step 486, the message fingerprint is checked against the appropriate long-term message store 232, 236. Only a percentage (e.g., 50%, 80%, 90%, or 100%) of the exemplars need to exactly match an entry in the appropriate long-term message store 232, 236 to conclude that a match exists. The long-term message store 232, 236 used for this check is dictated by whether the long or short message algorithm is chosen back in step 444. If there is not a match determined in step 488, the e-mail message 300 is stored in the mailbox of the user in step 484. Otherwise, processing continues to step 490 where the second count for the fingerprint entry is incremented in the long-term store 232, 236. When the second count is incremented, the fingerprint entry is moved to the beginning of the long-term store 232, 236 such that the least stale entry is at the beginning of the store 232, 236.

In step 492, a determination is made to see if the e-mail message 300 is unsolicited. If the second threshold is exceeded, the e-mail message is deemed unsolicited. Depending on determination made in step 456 above, the second threshold is

either one-hundred or fifty. If the second threshold is exceeded, the e-mail message 300 is stored in the bulk mail folder of the user's account in step 494. Otherwise, the e-mail message 300 is stored in the inbox folder. In this way, the efforts of unsolicited mailers 104 are thwarted in a robust manner because similar messages are correlated to each other without requiring exact matches. The first and second thresholds along with the times used to hold fingerprints in the exemplar database 208 could be optimized in other embodiments.

With reference to Figs. 4A and 4C, a flow diagram of another embodiment of an e-mail processing method is depicted. Fig. 4B is not a part of this embodiment.

This embodiment checks long-term message exemplars store 232, 236 before short-term message exemplars store 224, 228.

Referring next to Fig. 5, a flow diagram 440 of an embodiment for detecting similarities between e-mail messages is shown. The process begins in step 504 where an e-mail message 300 is retrieved. Information such as headers or hidden information in the body 308 of the message 300 is removed to leave behind the visible body 308 of the message 300. Hidden information is anything that is not visible the user when reading the message such as white text on a white background or other HTML information. Such hidden information could potentially confuse processing of the message 300.

To facilitate processing, the visible text body is loaded into a string or an array in step 512. The index of the array is initialized to zero or the first element of the array. In step 516, the first twenty characters in the array are loaded into an exemplar algorithm. Although any algorithm that produces a compact representation of the twenty characters could be used, the following equation is used in step 520:

$$E_n = \left( \sum_{i=1}^{i=20} t_i p^{20-i} \right) \bmod M \quad (1)$$

In equation 1 above, the potential exemplar,  $E$ , starting at array index,  $n$ , is calculated for each of the twenty characters,  $t_i$ , where  $p$  is a prime number and  $M$  is a constant. In this embodiment,  $M$  is  $2^{32}$  and  $p$  is 56,7319.

Only some of the potential exemplars  $E$  resulting from equation 1 are chosen as good anchors such that the potential exemplar  $E$  is stored in the fingerprint. Further to step 520, the potential exemplar  $E$  is converted to a binary value and masked by an octal value that is also converted to binary. If the result from the masking step

includes any bits equal to one, the potential exemplar  $E$  is used in the fingerprint for the message 300. The large message algorithm uses an octal value of  $157_8$  converted into a binary mask and the small message algorithm uses an octal value of  $55_8$  converted into a binary mask such that the small message algorithm is more likely to accept any potential exemplar  $E$ .

If the potential exemplar  $E$  is chosen as an anchor in step 524, it is added to the fingerprint and the array index is incremented by twenty in step 544. The index is incremented by twenty to get a fresh set of characters to test for an anchor. In step 548, the number of exemplars chosen for the fingerprint is tested to see if it exceeds forty.

Once forty exemplars are selected from the message 300, processing continues to step 556 where the exemplars for the fingerprint are stored in descending order. Storing in descending order allows searching more efficiently through the fingerprint during the matching process. If there are less than forty exemplars, a test is performed in step 552 to see if the end of the array is reached which signals that the analysis of the message body 308 is complete. Presuming the array is not completely analyzed, processing continues to step 516 where twenty new characters are loaded and analyzed.

Alternatively, the index is only incremented by one in step 528 if the anchor is not chosen in step 524. Only a single new character is needed to calculate the next potential exemplar since the other nineteen characters are the same. The exit condition of over forty exemplars and the exit condition of passing the end of the array are checked in steps 532 and 536. If neither exit condition is satisfied, the next element from the array is loaded in step 540. A simplified equation 2 may be used to determine the next potential exemplar,  $E_{n+1}$ , by adding the last coefficient and removing the first one:

$$E_{n+1} = (pE_n + t_{21} - t_1 p^{19}) \bmod M \quad (2)$$

In this way, the exemplars that form the fingerprint for the message body are calculated.

In light of the above description, a number of advantages of the present invention are readily apparent. E-mail messages that are similar to each other, but not exact, are detected in an efficient manner. Attempts by unsolicited mailers to send bulk mail are thwarted by robust matching of unsolicited messages to find patterns of distribution that exceed certain thresholds.

A number of variations and modifications of the invention can also be used. For example, the invention could be used by ISPs on the server-side or users on the

client-side. Also, the algorithm could be used for any task requiring matching of messages to avoid reaction to repeated messages. For example, political campaigns or tech support personnel could use the above invention to detect multiple e-mails on the same subject. Further still, some embodiments could re-categorize e-mail that is

5 subsequently recognized as unsolicited. The user accounts that received the e-mail before the detection thresholds were exceeded could be reorganized to move the unsolicited e-mail to the bulk mail folder.

In further embodiments, the present invention could be applied to other forms of unwanted electronic solicitation. Unsolicited advertisement shows up in chat

10 rooms and in electronic personal advertisements. The present invention can recognize these submissions as they are made. After a threshold of similar transmissions is surpassed, all other submissions are blocked.

Although the invention is described with reference to specific embodiments thereof, the embodiments are merely illustrative, and not limiting, of the

15 invention, the scope of which is to be determined solely by the appended claims.

WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1                   1.       A method for automatically processing electronic mail, comprising:  
2                   loading an electronic mail message;  
3                   removing non-textual information from the electronic mail message;  
4                   locating a first portion from the electronic mail message;  
5                   generating a first code smaller than the first portion and indicative of the  
6 first portion;  
7                   locating a second portion from the electronic mail message;  
8                   generating a second code smaller than the second portion and indicative of  
9 the second portion; and  
10                  storing the first code and the second code.

1                   2.       The method for automatically processing electronic mail of claim  
2 1, wherein the storing the first code and the second code comprises storing the first code  
3 and second code to semiconductor memory.

1                   3.       The method for automatically processing electronic mail of claim  
2 1, wherein the locating the first portion uses a different algorithm than the locating a  
3 second portion.

1                   4.       The method for automatically processing electronic mail of claim  
2 1, further comprising:  
3                   locating a second through  $n^{\text{th}}$  portions; and  
4                   interrupting the locating the second through  $n^{\text{th}}$  portions when a total  
5 number of portions reaches a predetermined count.

1                   5.       The method for automatically processing electronic mail of claim  
2 1, wherein the non-textual information includes at least one of header information, a  
3 subject line, an internet protocol (IP) address, routing information, hypertext markup  
4 language information, and an embedded applet.

1                   6.       The method for automatically processing electronic mail of claim  
2 1, further comprising removing everything from the electronic mail message except a  
3 message body.

1                   7.     The method for automatically processing electronic mail of claim  
2 1, further comprising arranging the first code and the second code according to numerical  
3 value.

1                   8.     A method for automatically processing electronic mail, comprising:  
2 loading an electronic mail message;  
3 selecting a first number of portions from the electronic mail message;  
4 generating a second number of codes from the first number of portions,  
5 wherein the first number and the second number are equal;  
6 determining if the first number exceeds a predetermined value;  
7 selecting a third number of portions from the electronic mail message;  
8 generating a fourth number of codes from the third number of portions,  
9 wherein the third number and the fourth number are equal; and  
10 storing the fourth number of codes.

1                   9.     The method for automatically processing electronic mail of claim  
2 8, further comprising removing non-textual information from the electronic mail message.

1                   10.    The method for automatically processing electronic mail of claim  
2 9, wherein the non-textual information includes at least one of header information, a  
3 subject line, an internet protocol (IP) address, routing information, hypertext markup  
4 language information, and an embedded applet.

1                   11.    The method for automatically processing electronic mail of claim  
2 8, further comprising interrupting the selecting the third number of portions from the  
3 electronic mail message if the third number reaches a predetermined count.

1                   12.    The method for automatically processing electronic mail of claim  
2 8, further comprising arranging the fourth number of codes according to numerical value.

1                   13.    The method for automatically processing electronic mail of claim  
2 8, wherein each code is smaller than its respective portion.

1                   14.    The method for automatically processing electronic mail of claim  
2 8, wherein the generating the second number of codes includes processing the first



number of portions with an algorithm selected from the group consisting of a checksum, a cyclic redundancy check, and a hash.

15. A method for automatically processing electronic mail, comprising:  
loading an electronic mail message;  
selecting a plurality of portions from the electronic mail message;  
interrupting the selecting the plurality of portions when the plurality of portions reaches a predetermined count;  
generating a plurality of codes from the plurality of portions, wherein the number of codes and the number of portions are equal to each other; and  
storing the plurality of codes.

16. The method for automatically processing electronic mail of claim 15, further comprising removing non-textual information from the electronic mail message.

17. The method for automatically processing electronic mail of claim 16, wherein the non-textual information includes at least one of header information, a subject line, an internet protocol (IP) address, routing information, hypertext markup language information, and an embedded applet.

18. The method for automatically processing electronic mail of claim 15, further comprising:  
determining if a count of the plurality of portions reaches a predetermined threshold; and  
selecting a second plurality of portions from the electronic mail message based upon the determining if the count of the plurality of portions reaches the predetermined threshold.

19. The method for automatically processing electronic mail of claim 15, further comprising arranging the plurality of codes according to numerical value.

20. The method for automatically processing electronic mail of claim 15, wherein each portion consumes more bits than its respective code.

1                    21.     The method for automatically processing electronic mail of claim  
2     15, wherein the generating the plurality of codes includes processing the plurality of  
3     portions with an algorithm selected from the group consisting of a checksum, a cyclic  
4     redundancy check, and a hash.

## PROCESSING OF UNSOLICITED BULK ELECTRONIC MAIL

### ABSTRACT OF THE DISCLOSURE

The present invention involves detecting unsolicited electronic mail distributed in bulk. In one embodiment, a method for automatically processing electronic mail loads an electronic mail message. Non non-textual information is removed from the electronic mail message. A first portion from the electronic mail message is located and a first code smaller than the first portion and indicative of the first portion is generated. A second portion from the electronic mail message is located and a second code smaller than the second portion and indicative of the second portion is generated. The first code and the second code are stored.

DE 7020806 v1

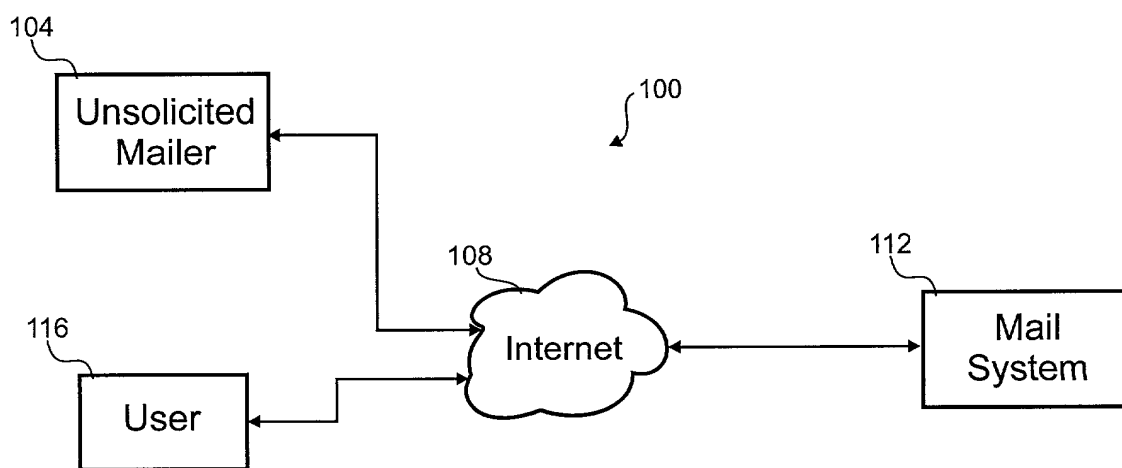


Fig. 1

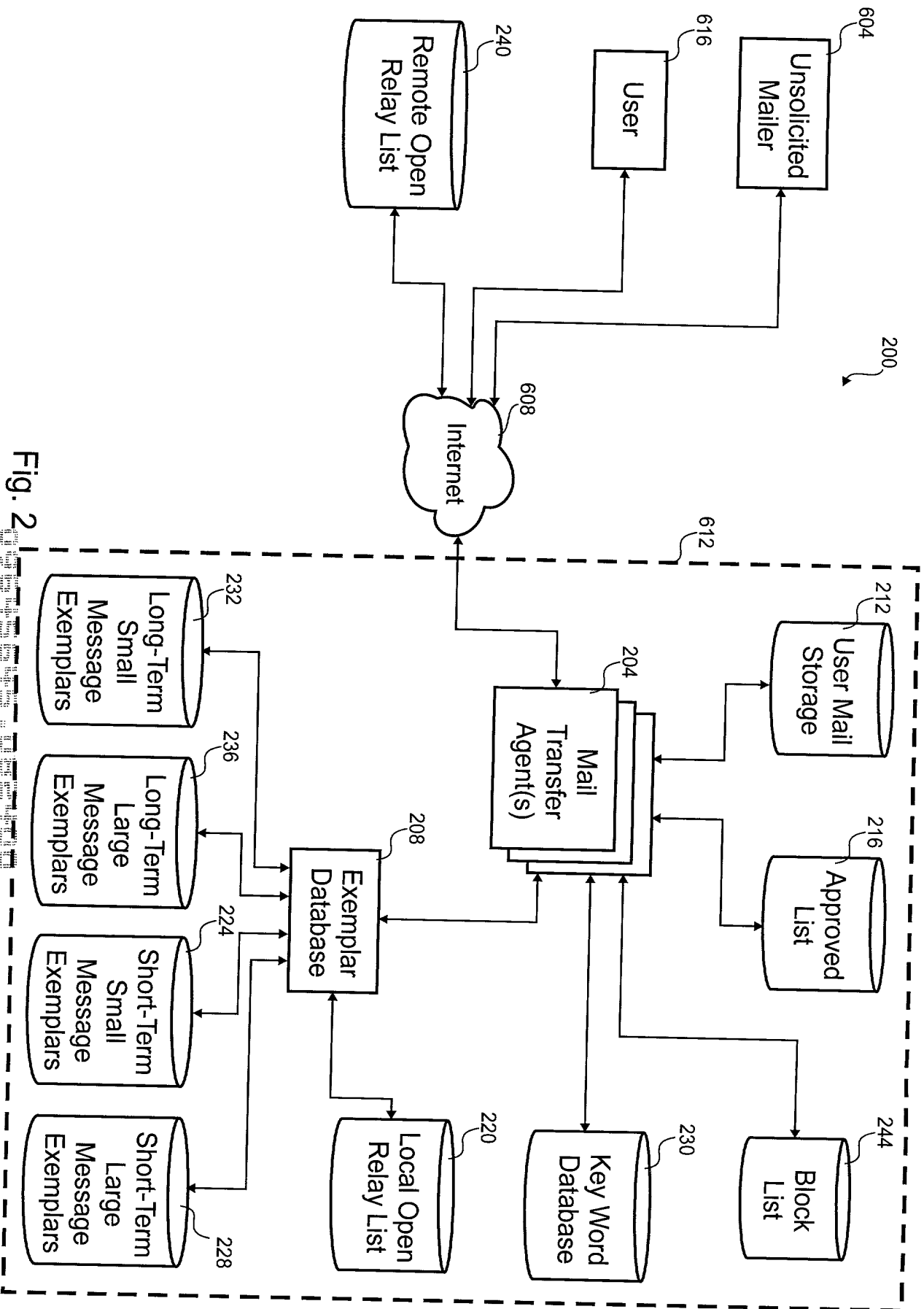


Fig. 2

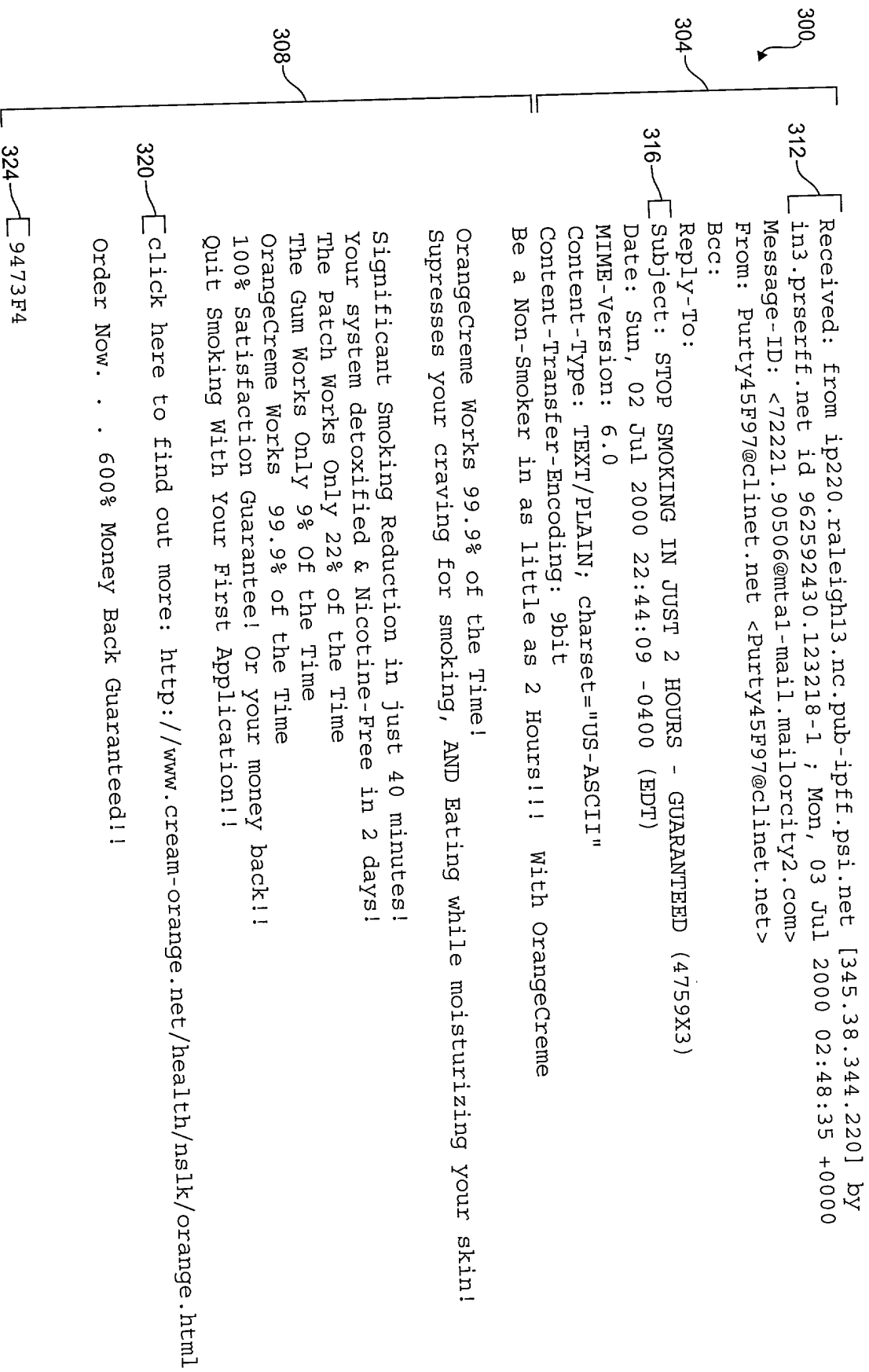


Fig. 3 (Prior Art)

FIG. 3 (Prior Art)

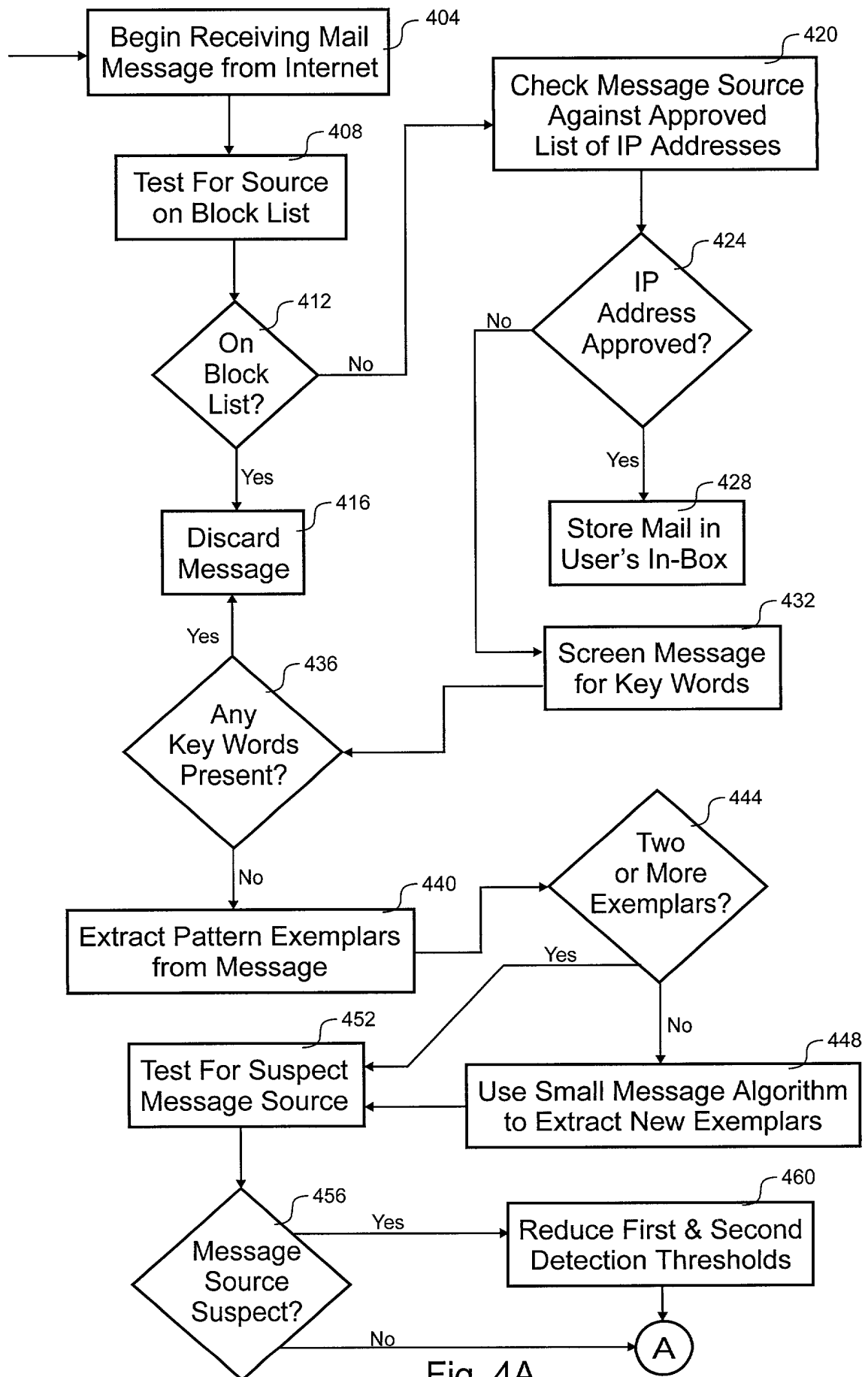


Fig. 4A

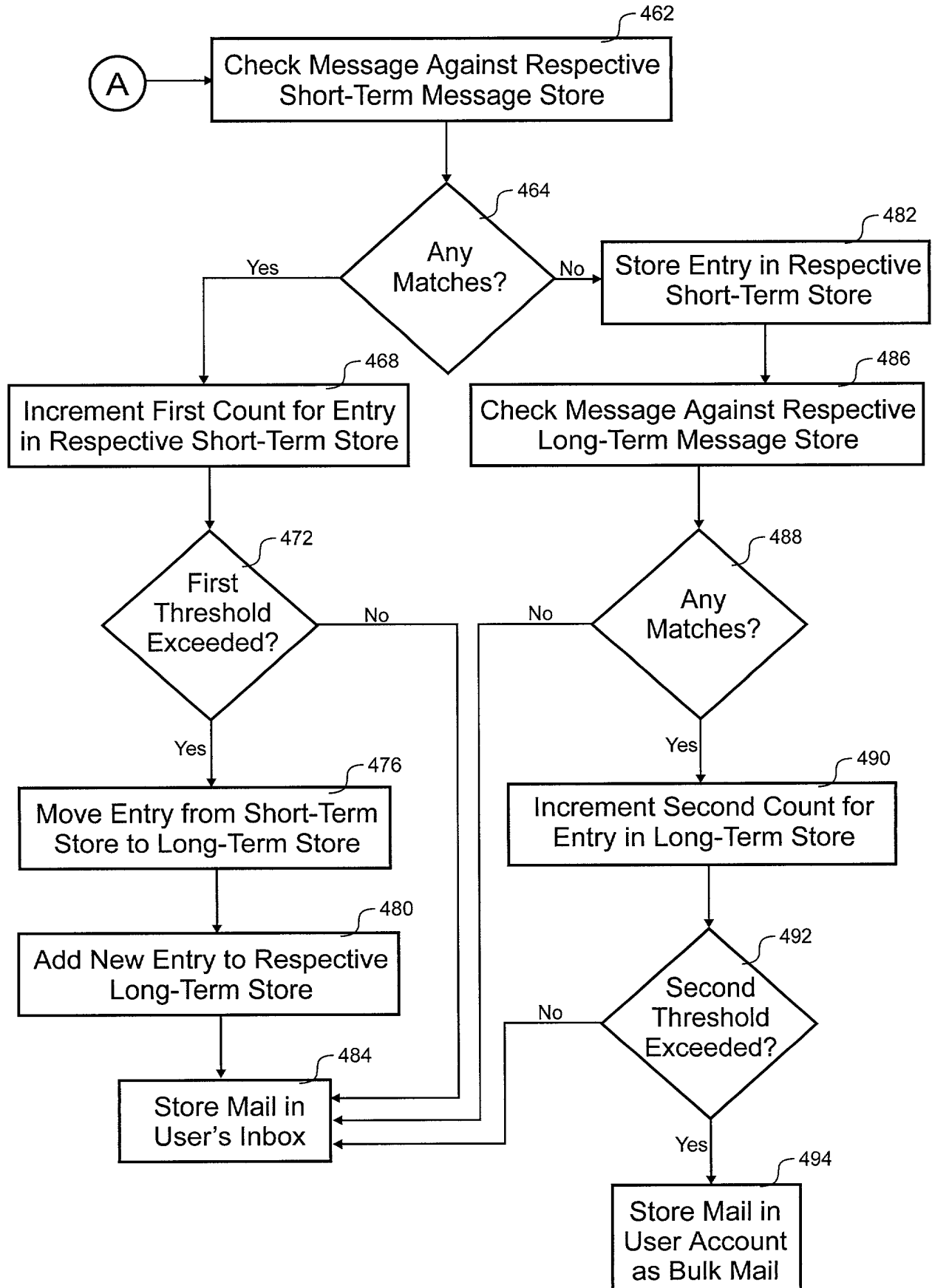


Fig. 4B



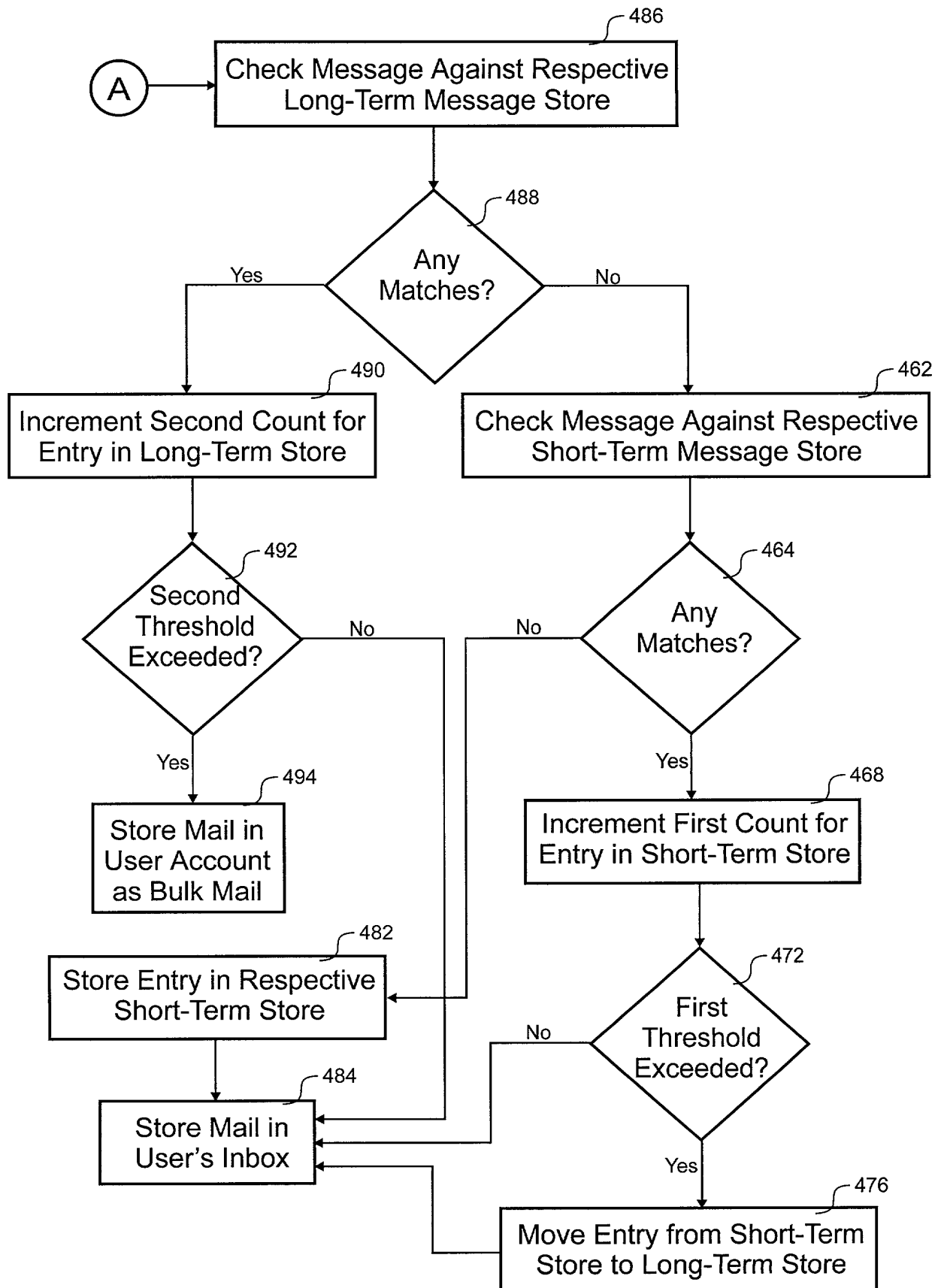


Fig. 4C

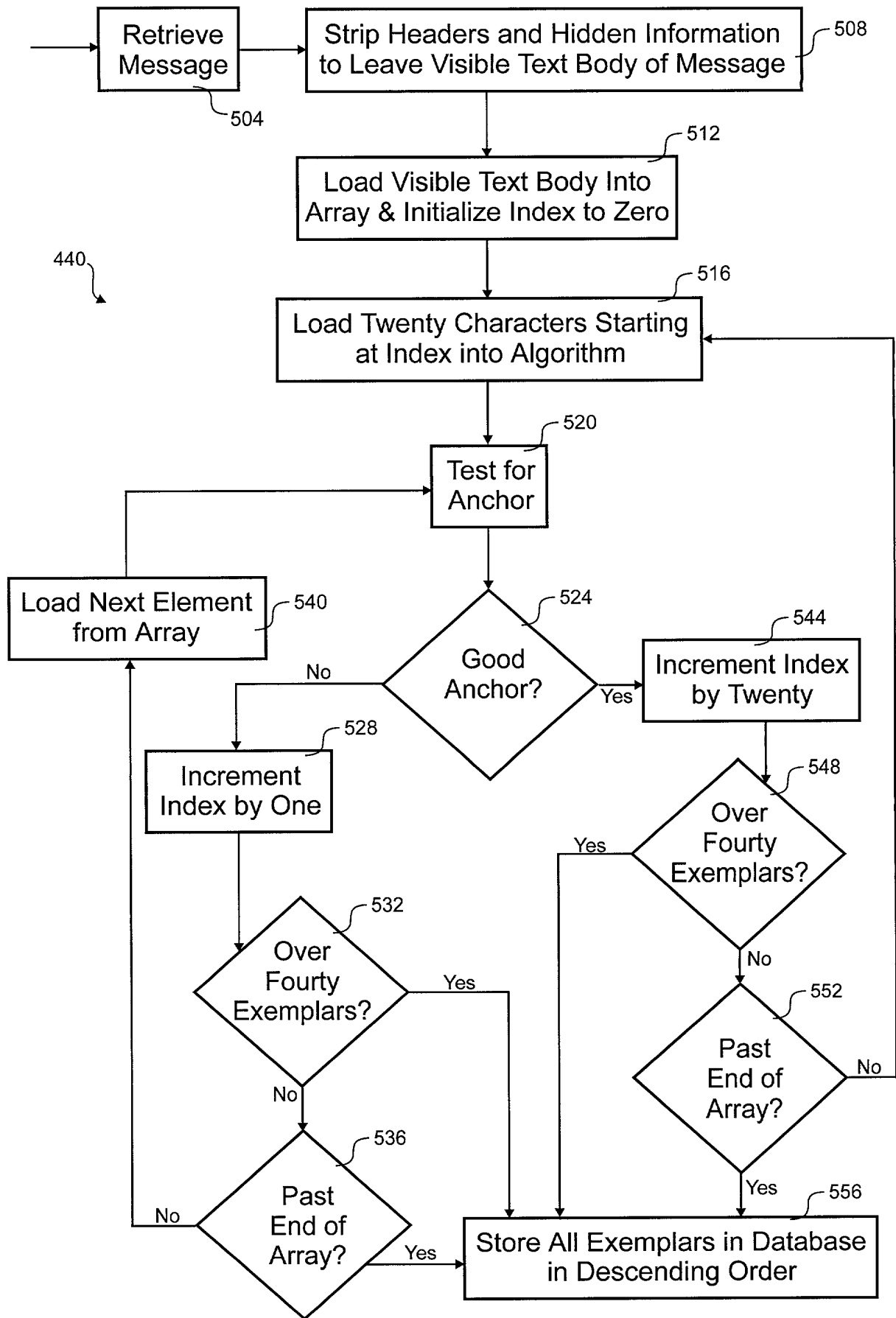


Fig. 5

### DECLARATION AND POWER OF ATTORNEY

As a below named inventor, I declare that:

My residence, post office address and citizenship are as stated below next to my name; I believe I am the original, first and sole inventor (if only one name is listed below) or an original, first and joint inventor (if plural inventors are named below) of the subject matter which is claimed and for which a patent is sought on the invention entitled: **PROCESSING OF UNSOLICITED BULK ELECTRONIC MAIL** the specification of which   X   is attached hereto or        was filed on                      as Application No.                      and was amended on                      (if applicable).

I have reviewed and understand the contents of the above identified specification, including the claims, as amended by any amendment referred to above. I acknowledge the duty to disclose information which is material to patentability as defined in Title 37, Code of Federal Regulations, Section 1.56. I claim foreign priority benefits under Title 35, United States Code, Section 119 of any foreign application(s) for patent or inventor's certificate listed below and have also identified below any foreign application for patent or inventor's certificate having a filing date before that of the application on which priority is claimed.

#### Prior Foreign Application(s)

Country	Application No.	Date of Filing	Priority Claimed Under 35 USC 119

I hereby claim the benefit under Title 35, United States Code § 119(e) of any United States provisional application(s) listed below:

Application No.	Filing Date

I claim the benefit under Title 35, United States Code, Section 120 of any United States application(s) listed below and, insofar as the subject matter of each of the claims of this application is not disclosed in the prior United States application in the manner provided by the first paragraph of Title 35, United States Code, Section 112, I acknowledge the duty to disclose material information as defined in Title 37, Code of Federal Regulations, Section 1.56 which occurred between the filing date of the prior application and the national or PCT international filing date of this application:

Application No.	Date of Filing	Status

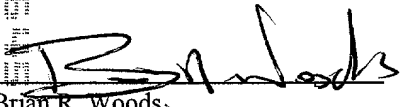
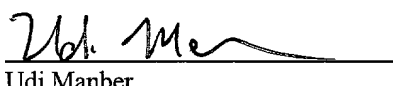
**POWER OF ATTORNEY:** As a named inventor, I hereby appoint the following attorney(s) and/or agent(s) to prosecute this application and transact all business in the Patent and Trademark Office connected therewith.

Philip H. Albert, Reg. No. 35,819  
Thomas D. Franklin, Reg. No. 43,616  
Lesley S. Craig, Reg. No. 26,578  
Darin J. Gibby, Reg. No. 38,464  
Chad S. Hilyard, Reg. No. 40,647  
Roger T. Barrett, Reg. No. 41,599  
William F. Vobach, Reg. No. 39,411  
Scott L. Ausenhus, Reg. No. 42,271  
Thomas D. Franklin, Reg. No. 43,616  
Ronald C. Gorsché, Reg. No. 45,505  
Patrick M. Boucher, Reg. No. 44,037

Send Correspondence to: <b>Thomas D. Franklin</b> <b>TOWNSEND and TOWNSEND and CREW LLP</b> <b>Two Embarcadero Center, 8<sup>th</sup> Floor</b> <b>San Francisco, California 94111-3834</b>	Direct Telephone Calls to: (Name, Reg. No., Telephone No.) Name: <b>Thomas D. Franklin</b> Reg. No.: <b>43,616</b> Telephone: <b>303-571-4000</b>
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Full Name of Inventor 1:	Last Name: <b>WOODS</b>	First Name: <b>BRIAN</b>	Middle Name or Initial: <b>R.</b>	
Residence & Citizenship:	City: <b>San Francisco</b>	State/Foreign Country: <b>California</b>	Country of Citizenship: <b>United States</b>	
Post Office Address:	Post Office Address: <b>260 Walle Street</b>	City: <b>San Francisco</b>	State/Country: <b>California</b>	Postal Code: <b>94102</b>
Full Name of Inventor 2:	Last Name: <b>MANBER</b>	First Name: <b>UDI</b>	Middle Name or Initial:	
Residence & Citizenship:	City: <b>Palo Alto</b>	State/Foreign Country: <b>California</b>	Country of Citizenship: <b>United States</b>	
Post Office Address:	Post Office Address: <b>883 Robb Road</b>	City: <b>Palo Alto</b>	State/Country: <b>California</b>	Postal Code: <b>94306</b>

I further declare that all statements made herein of my own knowledge are true and that all statements made on information and belief are believed to be true; and further that these statements were made with the knowledge that willful false statements and the like so made are punishable by fine or imprisonment, or both, under Section 1001 of Title 18 of the United States Code, and that such willful false statements may jeopardize the validity of the application or any patent issuing thereon.

Signature of Inventor 1  Brian R. Woods	Signature of Inventor 2  Udi Manber
Date <b>8/15/00</b>	Date <b>8/16/00</b>